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Prime Minister

The first paper in particular is interesting and worth a quick glance before Bonn.

Ref. A085/1230

MR POWELL

C.D.P.  
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I think that the Prime Minister may be interested to read the attached minutes by Dr F H Panton, who succeeded Dr Press as the Defence Scientific Adviser in the Cabinet Office, on the SDI research programme and "Star Wars".

The record has some cynical aspects with which

Approved by  
ROBERT ARMSTRONG  
and signed in his absence

1 May 1985

do not agree  
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*To date*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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SDI Research Programme

On a tour of the nuclear establishments in the United States early this month, CSA(MOD) accompanied by DIAWRE, took the opportunity to have a long exploratory discussion with General Abrahamson and his staff on possible co-operation in the SDI research programme.

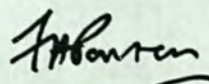
2. In this discussion, General Abrahamson apparently made clear his preference for bilateral co-operation, particularly with the United Kingdom. Multilateral co-operation would be difficult and time consuming to set up and difficult to operate. Co-operation with the United Kingdom bilaterally, under suitable bilateral agreements where these existed, would yield the maximum benefits to both the United States and the United Kingdom. The 1958 Mutual Defence agreement was obviously a suitable vehicle for exchanges on, for instance, such vital topics as decoy discrimination, warhead vulnerability and weapon lethality. Widening for SDI purposes of existing exchanges under the 1958 Agreement on these topics would require the President to make a "statutory declaration" to enable the necessary highly classified information to flow, and General Abrahamson seemed prepared to seek such a clearance. Other existing bilateral agreement or "MOU's" might be used on a Government to Government basis for the flow of non-nuclear information. On the commercial front, General Abrahamson was well aware of the difficulties foreign firms experience in bidding for contracts in the United States, and was ready to consider sympathetically, to the point of "affirmative action", ways of easing foreign firms into the SDI programme.

The next phase in official US-UK contact at the technical level is seen to be a longer visit to the US by a team of MOD scientists for full briefing on SDI and visits to US centres of SDI activity, followed by a visit by General Abrahamson and his

staff to the UK. Further briefings of UK industry by the US and by General Abrahamson and his staff are planned. However, it is thought that further exchanges should await a formal reply to Mr Weinberger's letter requesting co-operation.

4. All this is hopeful from the point of view of obtaining useful exchanges of classified information out of SDI collaboration, and underlines the importance of the UK conducting research co-operation through bilateral channels. Although I have yet to find out what the French "Eureka" initiative is all about, I do not think we should let this or other multilateral discussions deflect us from our bilateral purposes. This should not of course preclude keeping in political step with our European allies, on lines consistent with the Camp David Four points. Bilaterally, it should be possible for useful official links to be forged, and for these to assure, encourage and mutually benefit from such industry to industry contracts as may be gained. However, although the MOD has made some progress at making levels in identifying suitable topics on which MOD scientists and establishments might make useful contributions to bilateral exchanges, the problem of reallocation of resources to sustain bilateral co-operation has yet to be faced. I believe it should be possible to cobble together a presentable contribution important to the SDI research areas, on the basis of about 10 scientist years drawn from five MOD research establishments.

5. An interesting sidelight on the SDI programme is that \$100-200 million per annum (5% of the SDI budget) has been set aside to finance useful ideas for innovative research potentially applicable to broadly defined areas of the SDI programme. There will be an opportunity here for British Universities, if they are so minded, to put forward ideas for research funding.

  
DR PANTON

30 April 1985

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SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG *OR*

SDI RESEARCH PROGRAMME AND 'STAR WARS'

Thank you for your minute of 29th March 1985 (A/085/978).

Weinberger's letter to NATO allies confuses the situation somewhat. The following analysis is a mind clearing exercise, written down to give me some idea where we are on 'Star Wars' and SDI Research, what our objectives are or should be, and how we might go about achieving them. You may be interested to read it.

UK broad objectives in the Star Wars/SDI/Strategic Arms Talks context seem to me to be threefold. First, the prime objective must surely be to advise, assist and urge on the US (and the USSR) to build on existing arms control agreements and achieve with the USSR, as a first step along the road to a saner and more comfortable future, a substantial and verifiable cut in offensive weapons while maintaining a similar degree of deterrent stability as now, both for the super powers and for their allies. Second, the UK's concern must be for its own security, and for the maintenance of the effectiveness of its independent nuclear deterrent until such time as arms control/disarmament agreements render it superfluous. It is therefore very important that UK scientists should keep abreast of the latest developments in offensive and defensive weaponry. A third and subsidiary objective should be to keep as technically aware as possible of the US SDI research programme and 'Star Wars' concepts, by contributing to it, provided that the SDI programme does not begin to run foul of the ABM treaty, and provided that 'Star Wars' concepts and SDI research do not become obstacles in the way of real progress to a strategic disarmament agreement.

These broad objectives are, I believe, fully in accord with the Camp David 4 point statement of December 1984, and with the Prime Minister's support in February 1985 of the SDI research programme, and with her expressed hope that British scientists would contribute to it. They imply a sceptical mistrust of the 'Star Wars' concepts, and, at very best, a grave doubt about the real chance of achieving most of the objectives of the SDI research programme. However, although our, and other peoples', arguments and doubts may have forced prominent members of the US Administration to back away somewhat from the President's all embracing faith in 'Star Wars' and to postpone the prospect of developable achievements from the SDI programme until well into the distant future. We have to face the fact that the President's faith and the SDI research programme have not gone away. The programme seems likely to be alive throughout the present Administration and perhaps until an arms control/disarmament agreement plainly makes it superfluous or undesirable in its present form.

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? But we must not overlook the fact that although we may have little faith in and much distaste for 'Star Wars' and the SDI programme, the USSR may take a different view. Propaganda apart, it seems to me that Soviet leaders, in their strategic planning, advised by their military scientists (who themselves are deeply involved in pursuing similar programmes to those of SDI in many areas), will have to take something like a "worst case" view of US capabilities and intentions, and assume that the SDI programme will go ahead and demonstrate feasibility of 'Star Wars' concepts in something like the timescale propounded by the US. The virulence with which 'Star Wars' has been condemned by the USSR must surely be an indication of how seriously the Soviet leaders take the potential threat. So far, Soviet propaganda has failed to stop both SDI and the deployment of Cruise missiles in Europe, and these must be among the main reasons why the USSR has come back to the negotiating table. If so, then 'Star Wars' and the possible deployment of the fruits of the SDI research programme must be seen as a powerful bargaining tool in the hands of the US, which it would be stupid of them to relinquish or allow to languish. It would also be wrong for the UK, and counterproductive to our first objective to adopt positions or attitudes at this time which might, in Soviet minds, reduce the power of that tool.

The USSR can pursue and no doubt are pursuing three broad methods of negating the US 'Star Wars' threat. First, their propaganda is attempting to sap the will of the US to pursue the SDI programme. Second, they will no doubt attempt to buy off the SDI programme for as little as they can get away with at the negotiating table. Third, they will pursue their own military space programmes similar to SDI, with countermeasures to the known 'Star Wars' objectives. The aim of the West as a whole must be to stand firm against the first, and as regards the second, attempt to achieve such an agreement at the negotiating table that numbers of offensive weapons are seriously cut, enabling (third point), the SDI programmes on both sides, if not to be halted, then to be seriously inhibited. In the worst case, however, if the present talks fail to produce a measure of disarmament sufficient either by explicit or implicit agreement, to curb desires to implement 'Star Wars' concepts, then we may face an upward spiral of space deployments and offensive countermeasures. Against that eventuality, and indeed in order to be able to bring such pressure as we can to bear on the US at critical points in the negotiations, it is important that we should continue to distance ourselves from the development of 'Star Wars' concepts while contributing to and supporting the SDI research programme.

A difficulty in this is that the Weinberger invitation to participate in the SDI research programme is couched in terms which make it hard to respond helpfully without being accounted a full supporter of the President's concept of 'Star Wars'. The Defence Secretary's first preference was to work out a joint European programme in the National Armaments Directors Group and to present a joint response to the US. There are a number of drawbacks to that procedure. First, Weinberger's offer limits the exchange of information in areas of cooperation to that "short of ABM component level". This seems to represent a strict interpretation of ABM Treaty obligations, and, seen in the light of the present strict application of controls on information release by the Pentagon, would mean that there would be little prospect of information on ABM systems and concepts. The provision of a coordinated response by all NATO countries with the UK as part of that response, must reduce the chance of an exchange of information useful to the UK under its second main objective. Second, the National Armament Directors Group is not known for the speed and clarity of discussions. It would seem to be a somewhat surprising instrument for the coordination of a serious multilateral research programme. A third consideration is that NATO countries differ so greatly in their capabilities and will to contribute and in their national research interests that a coordinated response at the technical level will be difficult to achieve.

On the other hand, the UK ought to be capable of making significant contributions to the SDI research programme bilaterally, both from MOD Establishments, through existing channels, and from industry, coordinated by MOD, in such a way that the chances of getting a reasonable flow of useful information from the US will at least be better than if the UK's contribution was subsumed in a NATO effort. Through the 1958 Agreement, for instance, it might be possible to work up exchanges on damage mechanisms and systems analysis as extensions of those discussions which already take place in these areas. It might perhaps be feasible to offer a UK team to act as a "red" team, in assessing SDI ideas from a Soviet standpoint. While one should not be too hopeful about the prospects of achieving really deep and useful exchanges, we ought, if we are to make a serious contribution and at the same time protect our own national deterrent interests, to pursue a bilateral exchange rather than a multilateral one.

Indeed, it may be in a political approach to the 'Star Wars' concept rather than in the research field that NATO powers may achieve a greater measure of agreement and may make a greater impact on 'Star Wars'. Is it not possible to unite them behind a reaffirmation of the Camp David 4 points, and forming an appropriate coordinated response to Weinberger's letters, leaving each country to reply bilaterally in its own way to the specific point about research cooperation.

For the UK, MOD scientists should take the lead in exploring with their opposite numbers the possibilities for cooperation, keeping in close touch with and coordinating efforts by UK industry.

In brief, I conclude:

- (a) UK cooperation in the SDI research programme should be arranged bilaterally, as far as possible through existing channels, with MOD scientists in the lead technically. This will give the best chance of a reasonable return of information to keep the UK technically informed of the SDI programme.
- (b) If there is to be a coordinated NATO response to Weinberger's letter, it might be largely on a political basis, and essentially be a restatement of the Camp David 4 points, leaving each country to engage bilaterally as it thinks fit on the specific issue of research cooperation.
- (c) In all this it is essential for the UK to continue to avoid commitment to 'Star Wars' concepts and their deployment, in order to retain freedom to urge on the US (and the USSR), when necessary, restraint in the interests of substantial disarmament agreements, if these begin to appear possible.

*C. Branning*

for F.H. PANTON

3rd April 1985  
D/024

Dictated by Dr. Panton, but signed in his absence.